

decide if you can make an adjustment to any other work that exists in the national economy. (See §§ 404.1520(g) and 404.1566.) At this step, we will not use our assessment of your residual functional capacity alone to decide if you are disabled. We will use the guidelines in §§ 404.1560 through 404.1569a, and consider our residual functional capacity assessment together with the information about your vocational background to make our disability determination or decision. For our rules on residual functional capacity assessment in deciding whether your disability continues or ends, see § 404.1594.

(b) *Physical abilities.* When we assess your physical abilities, we first assess the nature and extent of your physical limitations and then determine your residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. A limited ability to perform certain physical demands of work activity, such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, or other physical functions (including manipulative or postural functions, such as reaching, handling, stooping or crouching), may reduce your ability to do past work and other work.

(c) *Mental abilities.* When we assess your mental abilities, we first assess the nature and extent of your mental limitations and restrictions and then determine your residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. A limited ability to carry out certain mental activities, such as limitations in understanding, remembering, and carrying out instructions, and in responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers, and work pressures in a work setting, may reduce your ability to do past work and other work.

(d) *Other abilities affected by impairment(s).* Some medically determinable impairment(s), such as skin impairment(s), epilepsy, impairment(s) of vision, hearing or other senses, and impairment(s) which impose environmental restrictions, may cause limitations and restrictions which affect other work-related abilities. If you have this type of impairment(s), we consider any resulting limitations and restrictions which may reduce your ability to do past work and other work

in deciding your residual functional capacity.

(e) *Total limiting effects.* When you have a severe impairment(s), but your symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings do not meet or equal those of a listed impairment in appendix 1 of this subpart, we will consider the limiting effects of all your impairment(s), even those that are not severe, in determining your residual functional capacity. Pain or other symptoms may cause a limitation of function beyond that which can be determined on the basis of the anatomical, physiological or psychological abnormalities considered alone; e.g., someone with a low back disorder may be fully capable of the physical demands consistent with those of sustained medium work activity, but another person with the same disorder, because of pain, may not be capable of more than the physical demands consistent with those of light work activity on a sustained basis. In assessing the total limiting effects of your impairment(s) and any related symptoms, we will consider all of the medical and nonmedical evidence, including the information described in § 404.1529(c).

[56 FR 57943, Nov. 14, 1991, as amended at 68 FR 51162, Aug. 26, 2003]

#### **§ 404.1546 Responsibility for assessing your residual functional capacity.**

(a) *Responsibility for assessing residual functional capacity at the State agency.* When a State agency makes the disability determination, a State agency medical or psychological consultant(s) (or a medical or psychological expert (as defined in § 405.5 of this chapter) in claims adjudicated under the procedures in part 405 of this chapter) is responsible for assessing your residual functional capacity.

(b) *Responsibility for assessing residual functional capacity in the disability hearings process.* If your case involves a disability hearing under § 404.914, a disability hearing officer is responsible for assessing your residual functional capacity. However, if the disability hearing officer's reconsidered determination is changed under § 404.918, the Associate Commissioner for the Office of Disability Determinations or his or

her delegate is responsible for assessing your residual functional capacity.

(c) *Responsibility for assessing residual functional capacity at the administrative law judge hearing or Appeals Council level.* If your case is at the administrative law judge hearing level under § 404.929 or at the Appeals Council review level under § 404.967, the administrative law judge or the administrative appeals judge at the Appeals Council (when the Appeals Council makes a decision) is responsible for assessing your residual functional capacity.

(d) *Responsibility for assessing residual functional capacity in claims adjudicated under part 405 of this chapter.* In claims adjudicated under the procedures in part 405 of this chapter at the Federal reviewing official, administrative law judge, and Decision Review Board levels of the administrative review process, the Federal reviewing official, administrative law judge, or the Decision Review Board is responsible for assessing your residual functional capacity.

[68 FR 51162, Aug. 26, 2003, as amended at 71 FR 16445, Mar. 31, 2006]

#### VOCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### § 404.1560 When we will consider your vocational background.

(a) *General.* If you are applying for a period of disability, or disability insurance benefits as a disabled worker, or child's insurance benefits based on disability which began before age 22, or widow's or widower's benefits based on disability for months after December 1990, and we cannot decide whether you are disabled at one of the first three steps of the sequential evaluation process (see § 404.1520), we will consider your residual functional capacity together with your vocational background, as discussed in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section.

(b) *Past relevant work.* We will first compare our assessment of your residual functional capacity with the physical and mental demands of your past relevant work.

(1) *Definition of past relevant work.* Past relevant work is work that you have done within the past 15 years, that was substantial gainful activity, and that lasted long enough for you to learn to do it. (See § 404.1565(a).)

(2) *Determining whether you can do your past relevant work.* We will ask you for information about work you have done in the past. We may also ask other people who know about your work. (See § 404.1565(b).) We may use the services of vocational experts or vocational specialists, or other resources, such as the "Dictionary of Occupational Titles" and its companion volumes and supplements, published by the Department of Labor, to obtain evidence we need to help us determine whether you can do your past relevant work, given your residual functional capacity. A vocational expert or specialist may offer relevant evidence within his or her expertise or knowledge concerning the physical and mental demands of a claimant's past relevant work, either as the claimant actually performed it or as generally performed in the national economy. Such evidence may be helpful in supplementing or evaluating the accuracy of the claimant's description of his past work. In addition, a vocational expert or specialist may offer expert opinion testimony in response to a hypothetical question about whether a person with the physical and mental limitations imposed by the claimant's medical impairment(s) can meet the demands of the claimant's previous work, either as the claimant actually performed it or as generally performed in the national economy.

(3) *If you can do your past relevant work.* If we find that you have the residual functional capacity to do your past relevant work, we will determine that you can still do your past work and are not disabled. We will not consider your vocational factors of age, education, and work experience or whether your past relevant work exists in significant numbers in the national economy.

(c) *Other work.* (1) If we find that your residual functional capacity is not enough to enable you to do any of your past relevant work, we will use the same residual functional capacity assessment we used to decide if you could do your past relevant work when we decide if you can adjust to any other work. We will look at your ability to adjust to other work by considering your residual functional capacity and